

minutes



Meeting HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 11th September 2006 (commencing at 2.00 pm)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

Albert Haynes
(A) Bruce Laughton
(A) Jim Napier
Philip Owen
Sheila Place

Ken Rigby
David Shaw
Andy Stewart
The Hon Joan Taylor

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIRS

The appointment by the County Council of Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor as Chair and Councillor Andy Stewart as Vice-Chair of the Select Committee was noted.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Select Committee, as set out above, was noted.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bruce Laughton and Jim Napier.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

PRESENTATION BY THE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT ON HIGHWAYS

Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor introduced the report and welcomed Bob Hart, Acting Service Director (Highways) to the meeting. Mr Hart was invited to give a presentation to the Committee on the relevant highways and road safety issues within the responsibility of the County Council.

A handout was circulated to Members that Mr Hart made reference to during his scene setting presentation. Mr Hart outlined the key areas of responsibility that included, the policing of highways, road safety, the condition of roads in Nottinghamshire and speed management.

During his presentation Mr Hart referred to the Highway's Services Best Value Review undertaken in 2002/03 and suggested that the Committee had regard to some of the work and actions that had been undertaken to improve services. This had included a 45 task action plan, referred to in paragraph 2 of the Environment Department's response. The results of this work had included the condition of the County's A road network improving from the worst to the 4th best in England (2005/06) when compared with other shire authorities. Details were also given on the performance status of current services such as the condition of roads and footways, street lighting and road safety reduction targets.

Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor thanked Mr Hart for his presentation and invited questions from the Select Committee.

In response to questions in relation to the County's footways, Mr Hart explained that usage was a factor used in determining if the footway was classed as a category 1 or 2 and also for prioritising work on the footways in need of repair. It was felt that it would be helpful for Members to have a copy of the footway categorisation criteria, together with examples of each category in their own areas.

Councillor Haynes wondered whose responsibility it was to enforce the parking laws. Mr Hart said that although this is at present a Police responsibility this was an area that was currently liable to change through the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement, with the intent of the District Councils coming on board with policing the network in collaboration with the County Council. Councillor Shaw wondered if this would also apply to the zig zag areas around schools. Mr Hart pointed out that this was different since in the County zig zag markings are not subject to legal orders and are only enforceable by the Police using their powers to deal with obstruction.

Councillor Shaw asked what percentage of street lighting faults were the responsibility of EON Energy Services. Although the information was not available at the meeting Mr Hart said that he would let the Committee have these details.

Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor said that she understood the problems relating to seasonal decorations on lamp columns were in part owing to the fact that they were not designed to take extra loads. Mr Hart confirmed that approval of seasonal decorations had been hindered whilst work was carried out to see if the lamps were able to withstand extra loads and ensure public safety.

Councillor Rigby referred to the decriminalisation of parking enforcement and wondered where the funding of enforcement would come from once the duties had been placed on local authorities. Mr Hart said that the income would be generated from fines since the service would have to pay for itself, and that a business case had been made to substantiate this.

Mr Hart said that it was due to the County's A and B roads being in a good state of repair this meant that more money could be put into the maintenance of its C class roads and unclassified roads. Councillor Rigby referred to Broxtowe Borough Council having received funding for maintenance of its footways and wondered why this was. Mr Hart pointed out that it will have been allocated funding for the maintenance of its footways by the County Council under their role as a "Manage and Operate Partner" of the County Council. How much it was allocated would be decided on a needs basis.

In response to a question from Councillor Shaw in connection with the determination of speed policies, it was explained that the County Council was responsible for this within the framework of very recently issued Government guidance and Mr Hart acknowledged that this was an area which is to be revisited.

The Select Committee asked a number of questions in relation to what they perceived to be anomalies with some of the County's speed limits, in particular, where areas had become built up. They wondered if speed limits could be dealt with much earlier on rather than after it had happened. Mr Hart acknowledged that there was a backlog and said that because of the need to comply with statutory and other procedures this was taking six to nine months and was an ongoing concern for the Department. He understood that the new guidance on the procedures for carrying out changes to speed limits would improve the current situation.

Councillor Rigby felt that it was important to include everyone in road safety. Councillor Owen said that it would be helpful for the Committee to have information on the £2m Accident Reduction Budget. Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor added that any information would be helpful for the Select Committee to see where the County Council could make a difference on the roads it had responsibility for.

Councillor The Hon Joan Taylor referred the Committee to the scope of its review and asked for their thoughts and comments. The Select Committee was reminded of the new role of departmental briefings. Martin Gately, Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that a press release had gone out to announce the review and encourage public involvement. Also as part of this information gathering exercise on public perception, it was felt worthwhile to see if there were any particular issues across the County which had been raised in the complaints book.

The Select Committee felt that interactive speed signs were valuable and welcomed them.

The Select Committee agreed to the suggested format for its future meetings and to the suggested framework for inviting key witnesses. In addition to this the Select Committee also felt that it would be useful to ascertain the views of the following individuals/group:-

The local Pedals group
Pedestrians and road users from urban and rural areas of the County.
Community Groups eg Parishes, Town Councils

The meeting closed at 3.20 pm.

CHAIR

Ref: highways select/m_11sept06